

CHARLES BEIN, BPA, PTS, JPS, PHS, SPA etc.

Charles Bein, of 55a St. John's Wood High Street, London NW8, began 'collecting things' in about 1920. In 1930, after a 25 year career in the City, on the Stock Exchange and in Banking, he turned professional Auction Commission Agent and Philatelic Broker becoming well known to all London auctioneers and most large stamp dealers.

In 1942, 'just for the fun of it and to have something to do during the long blackout evenings' Bein, who was unmarried, began to collect what he called SPIFS, a name he coined from Stamps Perforated with the initials of firms. Starting with about 30 specimens, he had by 1947 built up a collection of almost 30,000 stamps, exclusively of GB and Ireland, including 5,600 1d red plates of which he collected each plate number of each die. At that time he had found 7,000 different dies of which 740 were on 1d reds.

Charles Bein contributed several articles to philatelic journals, the first of these appearing in The West End Philatelist of October 1944. As a consequence of the publicity this gave him, he acquired by gift and purchase many more stamps for his SPIF collection and entered into correspondence with other collectors in Great Britain, the USA and Canada. In October 1946, 'PERFINS', the chronicle of The Perfins Club, welcomed Bein as their first overseas member but, writing to Robson Lowe in 1950, he confided that he had never met anyone else who actually collected SPIFS apart from a man in Scotland who had subsequently given up.

Bein himself, whilst continuing to add occasional items to his collection, lost interest in it from July 1947. Writing to an American friend in 1950 he said that it was 'all right when you have one or two albums into which you can put a few items every now and then, but when you have about twenty albums with many hundreds of pages each, and when perfins keep pouring in by the hundred to be sorted and classified and mounted, it can all get a bit too much of a good thing and what should be a pleasure and pastime becomes a burden'.

Much of Bein's correspondence has survived, including replies to letters which he wrote to various companies asking for information concerning the perfins dies used by them. The practice of writing letters of this kind was pursued with even greater enthusiasm by Keith Rymer-Young who was to acquire the collection after Bein's death.

One of Bein's occasional correspondents was the philatelic literature dealer, writer and publisher F. Hugh Vallencey, who in 1933 had published a booklet entitled "British Stamps Perforated with Firms' Initials". Vallencey was not a perfin collector but sold stamps to Bein for his collection at prices which, in 1945, included 1d reds and KEVII at 2d each and most other low values at 1d.

In January 1948, Vallencey asked Bein for his co-operation in the production of a proposed reprint of his 1933 booklet. The Second Edition of the booklet, which was published on 1st June 1948, incorporated many of Bein's suggestions, including the use of the name SPIFS, and information derived from his collection. Furthermore, the Foreword to the Second Edition was largely based on the wording of a letter written to Vallencey by Bein on 21st January 1948.

Some evidence as to the value placed by Bein on his collection is to be found in correspondence in April/July 1954 between him and Ron Bowman who was later to become the moving force behind the setting up of the Perfin Study Group in Great Britain. Knowing that Bein might be prepared to sell the collection, Bowman, on behalf of a named collector in the USA, made an offer of £50 for it. This was unacceptable to Bein who said that a dealer had expressed the opinion that it was worth between £350 and £400 and that an offer of that order for the collection, together with a large quantity of unsorted material that went with it, would be considered. The US collector, however, was not prepared to go to so high a figure and there the negotiations ended.

Between October 1954 and October 1955 there was a regular exchange off correspondence between Bein and Charles Jennings who became the first President of the Perfin Study Group. During the course of this, Bein made available to Jennings a considerable amount of information regarding his collection and much of this was incorporated into the book Jennings later produced, particularly in those sections concerned with the 1d reds.

John Nelson - 15th May 1993.